Donnelly's Revue

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Besides, He Really Needed The Money

By Tom Donnelly

Tonight on "60 Minutes" (8 o'clock on channel 9—WTOP) Mike Wallace probes the mysteries of the creative process in an interview with America's most celebrated man of letters, Pulitzer Prize winner Norman Mailer. Why did Mailer write his first biography, "Marilyn," a soon - to - be - published life of the late Miss Monroe? "To pick up a—a sum of money," replies Mailer. "It was a—it was a book which was a commercial venture for me. I needed the money very badly."

Actually, "Marilyn" isn't exactly a biography. Not a full-fledged one, certainly. As Mailer explains it to Wallace, "The book was written to be a preface, to look at photographs." Which means that Wallace wrote a little something to go along with dozens of pictures of the late sex goddess taken by the men who, in Wallace's words, "chronicled her short, skyrocketing career."

Mailer had "an absolute ironbound agreement" to deliver his text in two months, "because huge printing plants all over the world were waiting to get going." Mailer says that under the circumstances he "had to take certain dares and certain gambles." He didn't have time to "go out and interview people," and when he got to the very edge of his deadline and found that the job of doing an in-depth portrait of Marilyn was only "half finished", what could he do? He "let it get out there, " half finished.

Since he didn't have time to do interviews, Mailer relied on other sources for his information, primarily on biographies of Miss Monroe by Fred Guiles and Maurice Zolotow. "I don't pretend to the reader that I'm discovering new facts," says Mailer. Why, he "tells the reader 10 times over" in the pages of "Marilyn" that his book is based on other books.

Nevertheless, says Wallace, Mailer has been accused of plagiarism by Guiles' British publisher, who claims that massive sections of the Guiles book were used without permission. When Wallace asks, "Do you always put quotes around all of Guiles' material?" he gets an answer from Mailer that suggests the syntactical whimsy of a reluctant witness appearing before a congressional committee.

Says Mailer: "No, for a very simple reason, which is that when it seems to me that it's clear to the reader that it's from Guiles' material, and I'm drawing from Guiles' material, which is almost always led by a quote, because I'm very careful about this, I consider myself scrupulous about this sort of thing. You know, what do

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I have any interest at this point in my career in stealing from other writers?"

I can't be sure, but I think this means that Mailer feels if he quotes Guiles in, say, a lead-off paragraph, there's no need for attributing the substance of the next several paragraphs to Guiles, since the reader will be able to distinguish between simon pure Mailer and Mailerized Guiles.

Wallace says that if "Marilyn" *does* become "the book of the year" (at $19.95 a copy) it will be because of the last chapter, which "deals in sensational fashion" with Monroe's conjectoral relationship with the late Robert Kennedy. Mailer says "All Hollywood was gossiping about Marilyn having an affair with Bobby Kennedy . . . which I believe in fact she was *not* having. Although they were dear and close friends. So, if she could be murdered in such a way that it would look like suicide . . . for unrequited love of Bobby Kennedy, it would be a huge embarrassment for the Kennedys."

Mailer theorizes that Marilyn could have been murdered by right-wing elements of the CIA and FBI "because of the Bay of Pigs," and because there was a feeling that Kennedy was "moving to the left, was creating a rapprochement with the Communists." But nobody can be sure, says Mailer. "No one's talking and no one's going to talk" about the night Marilyn died. Except, that is, Marilyn Monroe's housekeeper, Eunice Murray, who was with the star on that final night. Mrs. Murray told Wallace that no such murder as Mailer dreamed up could have taken place because "no one was around." Had Mailer ever talked to her? No, said Mrs. Murray. "And my name is in the telephone directory and I never made any effort to hide."

Pressed by Wallace, Mailer says that he didn't call Mrs. Murray because he hates telephone interviews. So why take a plane to Los Angeles?

Mailer explains again. He had this deadline and he had something like 20,000 words to finish.

And there were all those huge printing plants waiting to get going.

And he really needed that money.